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THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Pamphlet No. 54

The
Continuity of Literature

Presidential Address, 1922

By

Edmund Gosse, C.B., LL.D.

November, 1922

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Mr. Gosse's Presidential Address

THE CONTINUITY OF LITERATURE

My feelings this afternoon would be ill-expressed if I did not find a few words to describe my pride and my pleasure in the honour you have done me by appointing me your President.

I live far apart from your admirable activities, and I have never had the advantage of sharing your labours. I should therefore be frankly at a loss to know how you discovered me, did I not think the answer simply to be that you felt by instinct my sympathy in your work. So far, and so far only, can I dare to justify your choice. Your energy is all expended in spreading and in regulating the love of English Literature; and that has been my aim also all my life. Sixty years ago, furtively devouring Charles Lamb and Shelley in class-time, I became unconsciously dedicated to the religion of which you are the priesthood. In those dim years I was without a guide—without a star, as the poet says—merely by the magic of sweet music driven along a course which is now swept and rolled, elaborately mapped, and provided with sign-boards of all colours like the pathways in a German forest. Those of you who are engaged in teaching are much exercised about these rules and sign-boards.

The report on 'The Teaching of English in England', which Mr. Fisher ordered and Sir Henry Newbolt has edited, testifies to your zeal, and also, you will forgive me for saying, your bewilderment. The subject is one of very grave importance and difficulty, but I want to say quite clearly, at the outset, that it is not my subject to-day. I do not address myself to the teaching of children, but I offer a few reflections to those who study literature in the first instance for their own comfort and instruction.

The subject I do venture to bring before you is one upon which I find myself holding views divergent from many critics who write at the present moment with authority and acceptance. But before I start, I should like to protest against the complaints which I constantly hear made of the 'indifference' of the public to literature. As a nation we English love to depreciate ourselves collectively. To read the lamentations of the newspapers, an inhabitant of another planet would believe that for slothful materialism and abject dullness

England could hold its own with any tribe of central Africa. But this is merely our amusing national foible for washing our own dirty linen in public, and carefully exhibiting it before we wash it. I do not like exaggerated expressions, but I am quite ready to assert that so far from our being sunken in indifference to literature, there never was a time when literary matters were so keenly discussed in England as they are now; and as to international comparisons, I am equally confident in saying that France, with her long practice in intellectual exercises, alone among the nations of the earth exceeds us. The abundant and capable labours of the English Association are in themselves enough to make the charge of indifference a ridiculous one. If we expect vast hordes of persons to be thrilled and captured by the finest poetry and prose, to the exclusion of rubbishy and dissolute publications, we shall be deceived. Millions of men and women are 'indifferent' to literature because they are mentally incapable of receiving impressions from it, as blind people are physically incapable of receiving impressions from landscape. When we are talking about literature and art, we ought not to be thinking of millions. It is enough if we can dare to think of thousands, for many are called and few are chosen. But I deny that the comparatively few are indifferent—they are keenly ardent, and to them I address my observations.

You will, I think, consider, if you pay attention to the critical work at present produced in the midst of us, that the bulk of what is most serious in it is either metaphysical in character or it is confined to the analysis of detail. Each of these departments of the study is important; more than that, each is essential, but I regard with some apprehension the exclusive employment of either. The metaphysical examination of literature has been very much encouraged by the activity in this country of the disciples of a great Italian thinker, one of the most eminent men of the day—I mean, of course, Benedetto Croce. The tendency of this kind of aesthetic is to detach the interest of the reader of a literary production from the writer of it, and still more from writers that have preceded and now accompany that writer, in order to concentrate it on the intellectual or moral constituents of the work itself, which might be found graven on a slab in a primeval forest for all that the critic cares about the circumstances which led to its production. Pray do not take me to be attacking this impersonal and metaphysical attitude of criticism, which may be traced back to Diderot and Goethe, and is very possibly the most dignified and the most satisfying species of criticism which exists. It is not needful that I should defend to you what is most in favour among our thinkers at the present day. Still less would

I dream of attacking it. I only warn you that it ought not to be allowed to occupy the whole field of our thoughts. There are other aspects of literature not a whit less important.

Of the criticism which is confined to matters of detail it is easier for me to speak here. This is a very useful, but again not an exhaustive part of our task of interpretation. The study of literature in detail is found in its most primitive form in the review of novels in the newspapers. A book by a well-known author is welcomed; its plot is told in brief; and the novelist is either enthusiastically praised or gently blamed. This is criticism in its rudimentary form. The reviewer rises to a slightly higher stage of development when he not merely describes the story, but ventures to compare it with what the same novelist has published in earlier years. If his range still further broadens, and grows to include a comparison of the essential method of the novelist with that of other contemporary novelists, a much more difficult task is attempted, and the reviewer will need a broader canvas than a third of a column in a daily newspaper. You will observe, however, that in the course of this evolution the aim of the critic has changed its direction. In the original artless résumé of the story itself he aims at nothing more than at telling the indolent subscriber to the lending library what it is he will get if he sends a postcard for a particular volume. But as the critic's work increases in complexity, it tends to develop a new purpose. It ceases to regard the novel in question as a mere accident or current incident, and begins to touch on the universal trend of literature. The more it does that, the less prominence is it able to give to the particular book, but that is made up for by the increasing universality of the appeal to the thoughtful reader. The reviewer who has discovered that it is desirable to compare Mr. Beresford with Mr. Swinnerton has begun to be conscious of the continuity of literature.

It will not escape you, however, that such a critic will not have progressed very far, although he may offer us some stimulating and awakening reflections, if he merely confronts one living author with another living author of the same species. What I am hoping to be successful in commending to you is something infinitely wider and fuller than that. I want to revive, if I can, and to justify to you the historic attitude towards literature. This has many enemies at the present moment, besides the metaphysicians and besides the reviewers in detail. The most formidable enemy it has is our excessive preoccupation with present events. This affects other centres of intellectual life besides our own; it affects Paris, where M. Gustave Lanson has been making the neglect of history the subject of a special report to the Ecole Normale Supérieure. Another French

Professor of eminence has been deploring the 'disparition progressive des amants du passé'. The tendency is general, and it is very difficult to suggest any remedy for it. It is our cruel friends the journalists who have drawn our affections away from the past, who have impressed upon us the love of the moving scene in which we live, and who have made us *amants du présent*. They have discovered how to absorb our whole attention in the ardent and dangerous whirligig of our own time. We are told that we stand on the brink of a vast revelation, and that our age, that age of whose constitution we are molecular atoms, is re-constructing or is about to re-construct the world. Who can be surprised if we find the spectacle far more absorbing than any panorama of conquerors from Sennacherib to Napoleon?

This inveterate passion for modern actions and current movements has one result which presents both a ludicrous and a dangerous face. It leads directly to the proposition that all previous literature should be scrapped, as mechanics say, and that we should begin the whole thing over again. All our great forefathers, from Homer down to Tennyson, are mouldering tombstones in one vast, uniform cemetery. Let us plough it up, scatter the bones and epitaphs, and build useful edifices—picture-theatres or iron-foundries or railway-stations—on the site. When the Italian, Signor Marinetti, first proposed to make a holocaust of literature, with which he amiably coupled painting, sculpture, and architecture, he was received with shouts of laughter. More than four hundred years ago, Savonarola collected the luxurious books of the new Renaissance in the Piazza della Signoria, made a pile of them, and burned them to ashes in the midst of a vast and gratified crowd, who thus asserted their complete want of confidence in the continuity of literature. Terrible fellows, these Italians! You never know what they will do next to frighten the world. The Brera Library, however, still exists, and I am not sure that even in the heart of socialistic Milan the theories of M. Marinetti have been generally accepted. But his wonderful manifestos, his early Futurism, his later Tactilism, have been widely discussed, and the mere discussion of them has set free a large group of dissolvents which now act on the surface of opinion. We also to-day have our half-baked iconoclasts.

Savonarola was quite right, from his point of view, to regard the Renaissance with suspicious fury, since it was through the explosion of the Renaissance, blowing up the sides of the dark medieval cavern in which the spirit of man had so long been bound, that what we may call the landscape of literature first became visible. A monk of the twelfth century had no intellectual perspective. The

classic past was a region of which he had only heard a faint and fabulous report. It was supposed to be infested by demons, and by one fallen angel, named Virgil. Then came the miraculous awakening, Petrarch hanging in tears of ecstasy over the manuscript of Homer which he did not know Greek enough to decipher; on all sides the walls which hid the long and splendid country of ancient literature from the purblind Middle Ages, falling and revealing the sunlighted plains and hills of the past. It was at that majestic moment that the continuity of literature was first perceived, not indeed completely, but through the luminous haze of morning. You find the exact opposite to the attitude of Marinetti and the Futurists in that of a fifteenth-century humanist, such as Lionardo Bruni. I see him, in my mind's eye, marching along the streets of Florence in his long red robes, courteous and silent, with his grave eyes fixed on a vision, his exploring spirit ascending the perilous alpine fastnesses of Plato and Demosthenes as our explorers of to-day cast longing eyes up at the inaccessible crystal of Mount Everest. I cannot resist the temptation of reading to you a fragment of the 'Commentaries' of Bruni, as admirably translated by John Addington Symonds. This was written, as I suppose in Florence, just five hundred years ago:

'Letters at this period grew mightily in Italy, seeing that the knowledge of Greek, intermitted for seven centuries, revived. Chrysoloras of Byzantium, a man of noble birth and well skilled in Greek literature, brought to us Greek learning. I was at that time following the civil law, though not ill-versed in other studies; for by nature I loved learning with ardour, nor had I given slight pains to dialectic and to rhetoric. Therefore, at the coming of Chrysoloras, I was made to halt in my choice of lives, seeing that I held it wrong to desert law, and yet I reckoned it a crime to omit so great an occasion of learning the Greek literature; and oftentimes I reasoned with myself after this manner:—Can it be that thou, when thou mayest gaze on Homer, Plato and Demosthenes, together with other poets, philosophers and orators, can it be that thou wilt desert thyself and neglect the opportunity divinely offered thee? Through seven hundred years no one in all Italy has been master of Greek letters, and yet we acknowledge that all science is derived from them . . . Conquered at last by these reasonings, I delivered myself over to Chrysoloras with such passion that what I had received from him by day in hours of waking, occupied my mind at night in hours of sleep.'

If we desire to perceive how far we have departed from this spirit of passion and desire, it is needful only to glance at the critical doctrines which are widely promulgated to-day without exciting any protest from those whose duty it should be to protect the sanctity of literary tradition. The spirit of the present

generation is in a marked degree anti-traditional, and it would be easy, but tiresome, to show by copious quotation how welcome the spirit of revolt has become. I view with alarm this intellectual antinomianism, and I cannot help connecting it with a certain neurasthenia which is prevalent to-day. Looking around me, I cannot help feeling that there no longer exists among young people of ardour and intelligence any appetite for the ancient joys of religion, art and literature, or at least that they have created for themselves new pleasures which are hardly to be recognized as even allied to the old. I cannot believe that Lionardo Bruni's bosom would have throbbed to the artistic sensibility of machinery, nor that Petrarch would have been touched by the plaintive monotones of Dada. Efforts are now made to regard the great periods of past literature as dead wastes, to treat Cicero, Addison and Racine as lacking for us in all reality and interest. From an authoritative essay by a critic of to-day, I cull the estimate that 'for sheer dullness and stupefying conventionality' the three authors I have just mentioned are hardly exceeded. To such an audience as I see before me to-day, I should be wasting my breath if I appealed against such a pronouncement. But I may be allowed to remind you of the danger of allowing such reckless statements to pass without an occasional protest.

We are all agreed to-day that we must not permit the past to be regarded as a cemetery, nor the authors of the past as fossils. We admit that to do so is to display lack of imagination, of that historical imagination which awakened the flame of Italian humanism five hundred years ago, and which we must not allow in this mechanical twentieth century to die down into a heap of ashes. It is useless, however, to denounce a heresy, unless we can expel it by argument. The suspicion of literary tradition, which is so widely prevalent to-day, is not founded on a mere dislike to what has been praised by earlier voices, and now bores the jaded hearer. I think it is something more subtle than that. I connect it with those natural springs in the human mind which led, towards the end of the seventeenth century, to the celebrated quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, a quarrel which, in mitigated form and much modified by time, continues to rage through Europe at the present day.

It may be worth our while to recall very briefly the conditions under which the famous re-action against classic art began, because, if you will examine closely, you will see that both parties in the fight were inimical to what I wish to recommend to you to-day,

and that if either faction had been completely successful, there would have been an end to the continuity of literature. You may recall that in the middle of the seventeenth century a writer called Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin roused attention by continuing in pamphlets and prefaces to insist on the independence of modern authorship and to deny that antiquity was the sole model of form and material. It is always amusing to notice what little matters lead to great events, and the Battle between the Ancients and the Moderns has been traced back to so small a matter as whether the inscription on a triumphal arch in honour of Louis XIV should be composed in Latin or in French. The most vigorous of the defenders of the Moderns who took part in the tremendous battle which now ensued, and in which every author of eminence took part, was certainly Fontenelle, whose pamphlet called *A Digression on the Ancients and the Moderns* should be read by every one interested in the subject of our discourse, not least because Fontenelle, too little studied nowadays, is an exquisite writer. I translate and I abridge:

‘As the trees of antiquity were no loftier than those of to-day, there is no reason why we should suppose the brains to have been of a sturdier texture. Let the admirers of the Ancients hesitate before they assure us that their clients are the sources of all good taste and good sense. Physical observation must lead us to consider that nature has started us all, Ancients and Moderns, with equal advantages. And in fact, as the Ancients came first, and as their experiments save us an enormous amount of fumbings and mistakes, mathematically we Moderns must be better off than they were. And if in literature these Ancients reached a remarkable pitch of perfection, that is no excuse for the ridiculous deference and the blind idolatry which people desire to impose upon us. Admit, if you like, that we cannot surpass the Ancients, but do not pretend that we are incapable of equalling them. If we think the matter out, we shall see that the superiority must really be on the side of the Moderns, because a well-trained intelligence is the composition of the intelligences of preceding ages. It is one and the same intelligence which has been cultivated all down the centuries. Mankind neither deteriorates nor expands, but the wise discoveries of one generation add to the material which succeeding generations find ready for their use.’

These sentences were published in the year 1688, and I do not hesitate to call your particular attention to them, because they mark an extraordinary step in the elucidation of criticism. They were received with horror by one section of the combatants and with rapture by the other, and the battle went on

with much loud and vain noise of recrimination. But we need not, at this moment, care about that. The point is that Fontenelle had discovered a truth which had not so clearly been revealed to any one before him, a truth which has prevailed against all its enemies, and will prevail, but which we must never cease to do all in our power to vindicate. Consider those words of his: 'It is one and the same intelligence which has been cultivated all down the centuries.' Fontenelle has a very amusing remark elsewhere when he says that the despised moderns of his own day may come to be treated with as much dignity as the Ancients, and be pitted against the *beaux-esprits* of some far future age who may happen to be Americans. If he could revisit the world after two hundred and fifty years, how he would laugh to hear that all metrical science began with Walt Whitman!

It is no longer necessary, as in the days of Fontenelle, to fight against the tyranny of the Greek and Roman classics. Our danger is much more to allow ourselves to be brow-beaten by a taste for the extremely modern. I believe that it will be found that great political upheavals tend to accentuate the force of modernism in literary societies. The quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns began during the Fronde in France, and this was perhaps more than a coincidence. The Civil Wars in this country in the middle of the seventeenth century tended to destroy the taste of English readers for the pastoral idealism of the Elizabethan age. There was a complete repudiation of the Arcadias and the Utopias, and the wonderful literature of the preceding fifty years, losing its attraction, passed back into temporary oblivion. The Restoration had no use, and very little respect, for Spenser and Sidney and the poets of romantic enthusiasm; the readers and play-goers of Charles II and his successors were realists, and what they loved were *Hudibras* and the comedies of Wycherley. So, perhaps, we may see in the common neglect to-day of the great Victorian poets, some echo of the disturbance of the recent European war, which has shattered the meditative and optimistic dreams of popular imagination. In times of national agitation there is awakened an excessive desire to grapple with reality. The people cry to the poets and novelists 'Recall us to real life', and they meet with an instant response. I see to-day on all sides an inclination to dethrone the ideals of literature, to destroy everything which may be supposed to conceal or to adorn the bare facts of life. There is plenty of evidence, I think, that at this moment what is most greedily desired by young readers of the most intelligent class is a bolder and ever bolder stripping

off of the raiment of literature, so that we may contemplate humanity, without disgust at its deformities, in its absolute nakedness. I do not speak now of the great mass of readers, of the unfathomable multitude who buy the sentimental novels which are known as 'our best sellers'. Those are readers who do not read; they live outside the realm of literature altogether, and the tares which they cultivate will soon be cut down and tied into bundles for the burning. But I speak of those who, comparatively few in number, read with sincerity and intelligence. Whether we deplore it or not, this class is at the present hour deeply agitated by a curiosity about life which is not ignoble, but is certainly perilous. There is—I will specify no more closely—there is a passion for the unexpurgated which may dangerously blind those whom it animates to the sane continuity of literature.

I turn abruptly to a totally different aspect of the matter, and one which affects more closely the members of the English Association. Public attention has been drawn by the recent publication of the *Year's Work in English Studies*, edited by Sir Sidney Lee, to the surprising excellence and variety of the English scholarship of our day. No one, I think, can turn the pages of that miscellany without admitting that it justified to the full the place which this Association assumes in the country, and without admiring the zeal and the conscientiousness of so large a body of men and women. In addition to the actual essays and articles published in that volume, there are references to independent work in many other directions undertaken by members of the English Association. Believing that I have to-day the privilege of addressing not a few of these admirable workers, I take the liberty, at the opening of a new year of their disinterested labour, to congratulate them on their past efforts and to urge their continuance of a work which, no one knows better than I, must be in the main its own reward. When I compare what is being done by so considerable a number of persons with the state of English scholarship as I can remember it half a century ago, I am filled with astonishment. I particularly note the advance made in the study of Middle English, a district of literature almost entirely unsurveyed when I was a young man, but one absolutely essential to a student desirous of observing the history of poetry and prose in its continuity. For my own part, I may confess that neither I nor any other young student zealous for knowledge had any notion fifty years ago that Middle English Literature presented a bulky mass of important and interesting material. The period from 1150

to 1250 was practically a blank to us, for the telescope with which we tried to survey the scenery had a defect in that particular direction.

Over this department of special studies there hovers, however, a certain danger which, with some hesitation, I think I must have the audacity to approach. I detect a tendency, in the youthful and ardent student of a remote, small field of literature, to which it can do no harm to draw his or her attention. This consists of an excess of concentration on that single field. Where I see this danger particularly prevalent is in the theses now increasingly encouraged, in which an isolated fragment of literature is made the subject of absolutely exhaustive treatment. I must candidly confess to you that I do not like these theses, and that I think them a very unsatisfactory way of qualifying juvenile scholarship. They remind me of the pamphlet of 64 pages, in octavo, which Mr. Curdle issued on the Character of the Nurse's deceased Husband in *Romeo and Juliet*, with an inquiry whether he had really been 'a merry man' in his lifetime, or whether it was merely his widow's affectionate partiality that induced her so to report him. It is hinted that Mr. Curdle was not intimately acquainted with any of the other characters in that celebrated drama. Aspirants to the honours of a successful thesis sometimes apply to me for help, which I am happy when I find myself able to give. But I am generally pained to discover that they have been so extremely anxious to note every minutest particular about their immediate province that they have been able to spare no time to master even the outlines of the surrounding country. I remember a thesis—it was a successful one—devoted to a very obscure playwright of the Restoration period, the author of which went to the length of recounting the plot of every one of the author's numerous and wretched dramas, but had not read one single work by any of the playwright's contemporaries.

This is to look at literature on a very small scale, and through the wrong end of the telescope; such a practice is open to many disadvantages. Not only is it bound to be fragmentary and ineffective, but it leads to error and injustice. When I was young, it was the fashion to say that Pope was not a poet and that an acquaintance with his works was useless. His value as a link in the chain is now admitted, and we can as little afford to lose sight of Pope as we can of Marlowe or of Keats. It is now the fashion, among some of the younger sanhedrim, to eject Milton from respectful consideration, and as for Tennyson, the self-respecting Georgian critic would blush to admit that he had a copy of Tennyson in the house. All this is

very childish, and it is a reversion to the barbarous days when want of knowledge made pardonable an ignorance which is now nothing better than a presumptuous affectation. The tendency of one age to break with the tradition of the age which immediately preceded it is quite another thing. This appears to be an inevitable result of growth, which insists on change. You will observe, if you take a wide view of literary history, that its periods do not often continue one another. On the contrary, they rise out of a rupture with the immediate past, and it is, of course, a commonplace of criticism that in European literature, viewed broadly, the streams of inspiration have commonly invaded the art of writing from other countries, and have not descended down native lines. But this—though it leads to a sudden depreciation, as we find Dryden deaf to the music of the Elizabethans, and Wordsworth fanatically anxious to destroy the prestige of the eighteenth century—this is only a temporary injustice. The new faith itself becomes old, and is rejected in favour of a still newer religion, under whose auspices the old gods come back into their proper perspective.

That a deep unity of purpose runs through all the manifestations of literature was not perceived until the middle of the eighteenth century. Gibbon had a glimmering of the truth, but early abandoned the effort to pursue it. It constantly seems to be dawning on Voltaire. In 1760 Gray began to collect materials for a *History of Poetry*, which would have laid the foundations of a comparative study such as had never before him been attempted. The labour of collecting material daunted Gray's hypochondria, and after some months he abandoned the project, leaving behind him several interesting fragments, which testify to the breadth of the survey he proposed to make. Ten years later, the *History of English Poetry* was essayed and carried to greater completion, by Thomas Warton. But Warton excluded the drama, and knew little of exotic literature. Nevertheless, he deserves our high esteem for the courage of his experiment. What was said of Warton a hundred years ago is true to-day, he was 'the first adventurer in the extensive region through which he journeyed', and his value as a pioneer consists in the fact that he discovered it to be one region, not a set of unrelated islands floating in a vague and uncharted ocean.

But we have to descend to the beginning of the nineteenth century before we come upon a historian of literature who really perceived its unbroken continuity, and whose erudition empowered him to treat it continuously. The name of Henry Hallam is now seldom mentioned, in spite of the great reputation which that historian enjoyed eighty

or ninety years ago. I despair of exciting your curiosity in his massive *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, which indeed is neither lively nor sympathetic. But Hallam deserves respect. He lacked vivacity, but not candour nor elevation; above all he cultivated the broad view. Until he wrote, little attention had been paid to the fact that literature is bound up with society, with the social order, that it is a mirror of human progress, even when it seems to run counter to social prejudice. The disinterested historical curiosity of Hallam and his laborious rectitude are qualities which demand recognition. I do not urge that you should spend much time over Hallam, many of whose opinions are wanting in appreciative intelligence. But you should glance at him, more for his method than for the detail of his execution.

In connexion with the subject before us, I would ask you to admit that no perfectly fixed judgement on a particular author is either desirable or possible. It is the crudest sort of criticism which says that Keats is a good poet and that Tennyson is a bad poet, or that Gibbon is a bad prose-writer and that Sterne is a good one. In the case of authors of this recognized magnitude the epithets 'good' or 'bad' are an impertinence—they simply obscure our vision. What criticism has to do, in the historical sphere, is to take in the whole field of poetry and prose from the earliest times, and discover where the particular object of its attention fits in to the prodigious scheme. It is not in the slightest degree necessary that you should attempt to map the whole extensive continent in detail. This would be a task beyond the powers of an ardent intelligence ceaselessly at work through a lifetime prolonged to the years of Methuselah. But a very moderate study will enable any one to master the broad lines of European literature from Aeschylus to our own hectic and crowded age. Against the attacks of certain recent iconoclasts, I shall defend with my latest breath the chronological system. Much is often said in ridicule of the growing practice of commemorating literary centenaries; I am wholly in favour of it. We shall presently have upon us the occasion of the death of Shelley, and although I may see inconveniences in it, I welcome the coming of that commemoration. The centenary is a practical mode of reviving interest in what has partially faded into the background. It is popular, and I do not expect to see it limited to the poets. I expect to see it extended to the inventor of the motor-car and the discoverer of the secret of bottled beer. But these also have their places in the continuity of civilization, and we must not grudge them their revival.

But for us—for you and for me—Literature is the great thing.

Let us never be ashamed of our infatuation, which has been shared by the wisest of mankind. And do not imagine that vacillations of taste, or fashion now up and now down, interfere with the vast continuity. I entreat you not to be ashamed of being 'of the centre'. The Literature of Europe is an immense stretch of country which retains and will always retain its individual and relative characteristics, its streams flowing through champagnes, its hills lifted, by slow degrees, out of the surrounding plains. But although it is the same country, the sky above it shifts incessantly, and the taste of successive generations looks at it under different lights. Now all seems dim; but a wind of doctrine rises, and the white spires of genius are once more illuminated; the sun catches the surface of a lake which we had missed, and clouds obscure a field that to our forefathers seemed luminous. These are the effect of conditions of life upon literature, but literature itself remains unchanged, and disinterested historical curiosity will continue to reveal its perennial power and charm.

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